

Fulbright Home Inspections Newsletter

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OF FULBRIGHT HOME INSPECTIONS

Zinsco or Sylvania-Zinsco Panels and Breakers

Also see: <http://www.nachi.org/bbsystem/viewtopic.php?t=13903>

Home Inspection Report Language for Zinsco or Sylvania-Zinsco Electrical Equipment Hazards

Visual Inspection of Zinsco Panels Will Not Reliably Show Unsafe Conditions. Most of the time we check a Zinsco/Sylvania panel it looks great to the naked eye even with the cover off. There may be no obvious heat damage or signs of conductor damage. Home inspectors who comply with the ASHI or other Standards of Practice will remove the electric panel cover but they will not remove the circuit breakers themselves nor perform any other disassembly of electrical panel components. This restriction is established for the safety of the inspector who will not usually have the same level of electrical training as a licensed electrician.

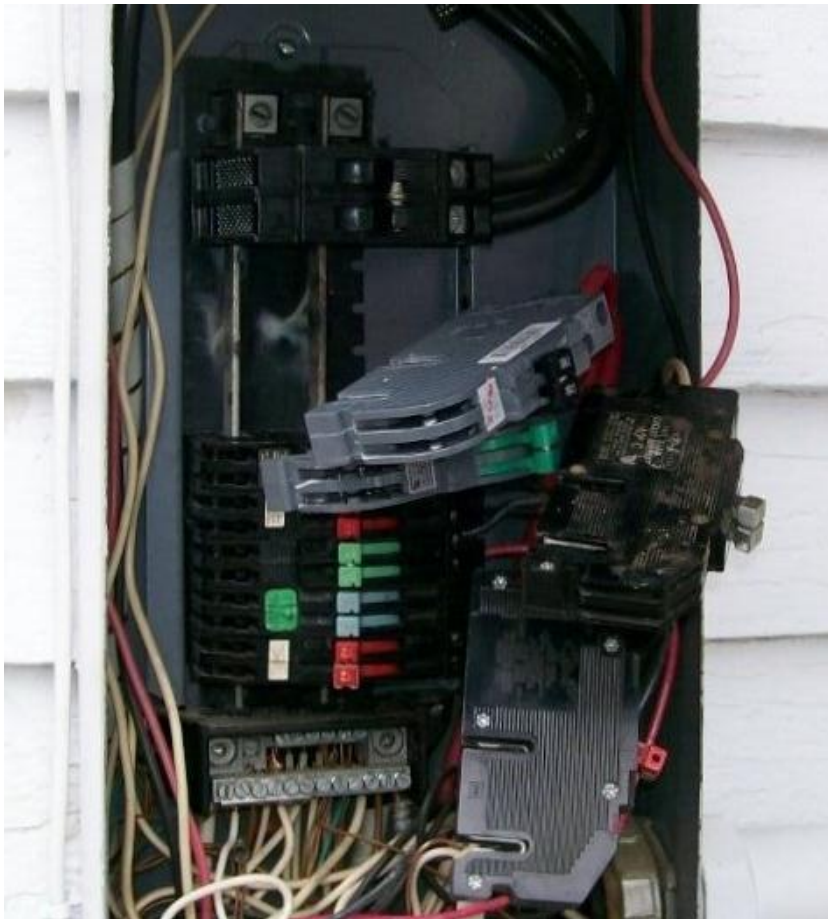
Inspecting in this manner will usually not disclose damage even though very significant damage such as overheated connections, blown-out circuit breakers, or other failures may be present. Many of the panels we see do not have a main breaker so the only way to disconnect all the power is to have the meter pulled out by the power company - a step well beyond the scope of a home inspection.

We see damage in about 25% of the Zinsco/Sylvania panels that are checked. The problem occurs mostly on circuit breakers feeding circuits that have a steady heavy load on them (like heaters, hot water tank, dryer), and on circuits that are often overloaded such as circuits that supply the kitchen or bathroom.

In houses with Zinsco/Sylvania electrical panels and circuit breakers, I have tested these circuits with up to 30 amps on a 20 amp circuit breaker. The Zinsco circuit breaker will carry the overload for a long time without tripping. This causes the connection to heat up and start arcing to the buss bar. The problem is primarily in the panels with aluminum buss bars, but also has been seen in the ones with copper buss. Moisture seems to accelerate the process.

These circuit breakers are very poor quality and do not provide a safe level of over current or short circuit protection.

A Zinsco TM or GTE-SylvaniaTM-Zinsco [or Kearney] electrical panel is installed in this building. Serious electrical hazards may be present in the electrical panel which could result in overheating, fire, or inability to turn off the electrical power in the home. A licensed electrician who is familiar with this equipment should be called to inspect the panel for immediate fire and shock hazards. Significant expense may be involved. Additional information about this hazard is available at an independent building failures research website: www.inspect-ny.com/electric/Zinsco.htm



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